

HYATTSVILLE HARDWARE
5121 Baltimore Avenue
Hyattsville
Prince George's County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-1042

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PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HYATTSVILLE HARDWARE COMPANY

HABS NO. MD-1042

Location: 5121 Baltimore Avenue, Hyattsville, Prince George's County, Maryland

Significance: Hyattsville Hardware is an intact turn-of-the-century hardware store with original interior features such as a pressed-tin ceiling, shelving, cases and bins. It is also of interest as one of few surviving buildings from the early business district of Hyattsville (late-19th to early-20th century). Most of buildings of its vintage were replaced, beginning in the 1930s.

Description: This is a three-story, three-bay-wide commercial brick structure with a shed roof. As an urban structure, it is far deeper than it is wide, and its parallelogram shape conforms to the lot. Storerooms to the rear add to its depth. Though it originally stood alone, it has been flanked by other buildings.

The front of the first story was altered in recent years when new storefront windows were added. The previous storefront windows (as seen in a ca. 1913 photograph hanging inside the store) were three-sided bays with wood panels below. The entryway has double-doors with a large light above raised panels.

On the second and third stories are paired, two-over-two-light double-hung sash windows with flat-arched brick lintels. There is a simple pilaster between the windows with an incised wood arch between the window and lintel. A belt-course, at the level of the lintels, runs above the second- and third-floor windows, stepping over the lintels. There is a corbeled brick cornice. A painted sign reading "HYATTSVILLE HARDWARE Co." runs the length of the cornice.

On the interior, the walls to either side are brick, lined with shelves from the floor to approximately 18" from the ceiling. A ladder running along a track mounted at the top of the shelving unit provides access to the

higher shelves. There is a counter along the north side of the store, with glass cases to the front and center. The floors are wood and the ceiling is covered with ornamental pressed tin. There is also a pressed-tin cornice in a lamb's-tongue-and-dart pattern. There are a number of old storage boxes including octagonal, free-standing units lined with small drawers, and a metal stand with open bins for nails. To the rear of the store there is an office to the north side (with a large glass window looking into the store), and an open doorway into the storage area to the south.

There is a two-story, wood-frame structure which adjoins the hardware store. It has two doorways on the first story and two-over-two-light double-hung sash windows on the second story, all asymmetrically placed.

History:

The Hyattsville Hardware Store building was originally used as a blacksmith shop and wagon & carriage manufacturer, beginning in the late 19th-century (as nothing appears here on the Hopkins Atlas of 1878, it was built sometime after that). The building appears on the 1906 Sanborn Fire Insurance map as a "blacksmith shop and carriage ho." (house). By 1911 it is shown as the "Fire Dept, hose ho." (house). By ca. 1913, it had become a hardware store (the carriage manufacturer's shop remains on the second floor but was inaccessible due to HABS to insurance restrictions). It has remained Hyattsville Hardware since that time, currently under its third owner/operator, William Risdon, who has been here for nineteen years. It was previously operated by the Norman family.

The painted sign along the cornice of the building is significant as a surviving example of a now-vanishing advertising tradition. Large signs advertising businesses, both applied to or projecting from the building, had become an American tradition as early as the 1840s-50s. The age of the automobile, however, commanded larger, more eye-catching signs, geared towards the passing motorists

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(Leibs, pg 41). Painted signs on buildings were an important part of the advertising tradition.

The sign in the cornice is all that remains of the hand-painted advertising that once covered the entire east front and north side of the building. It was painted by Hasson & Haynes advertising service ca. 1913. Mr. Hasson's shop once sat at the south end of this block. Tradition has it that he painted the advertising on the hardware store free-of-charge, in exchange for including his own advertising. Hasson painted his company name and information "Hasson & Haynes, House & Sign Painting, shop Hyattsville, Md." and a mural of the town on the side of the building. He covered the entire front with advertising for the store's wares, including paints and glass, and store guarantees. All that remains of Hasson's handiwork is the name which appears along the cornice (Risdon, & ca. 1913 photo located inside the store).

The structure which now adjoins the store to the north was originally a dwelling that was later joined, by means of an addition, to the hardware store and a false front added. According to Sanborn Insurance maps, this was done sometime between 1922 and 1933. At one time, it too had a store front and appliances were sold out of it. It has since been further altered, with aluminum siding hiding any evidence of its former appearance. It now serves as storage space for the hardware store.

Sources:

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of Prince George's County Maryland. Washington, D.C. Hopkins publishing, 1878.

Leibs, Chester H. Main Street to Miracle Mile. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985.

Pettit, Anne (GWU). Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory Form, 5100 block of Baltimore Avenue, Hyattsville,

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prepared March 1987.

Risdon, William (current owner) interview with
Catherine Lavoie, 4 April 1991.

_____. Historic photograph in possession of
owner, Hyattsville Hardware ca. 1913.
Shows original appearance for Hardware
business, and painted advertising.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Hyattsville,
Maryland, Baltimore Avenue, maps for
1906, 1911, 1922, 1933, 1939; Library of
Congress.

Historian:

Catherine C. Lavoie
Historic American Buildings Survey
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